

# BETWEEN THE LINES

**Newsletter on the Status of Women at Concordia**

## **WHAT IS NEW AT THE OFFICE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN?**



In May of 1994, the Board of Governors approved the recommendation by the Review Committee on the Office of the Status of Women to make the Office permanent and to appoint a University Advisor on the Status of Women for a 5-year renewable term. A Search Committee composed of Kathy MacDonald as Chair, Marianne Ainley, Rosemarie Schade, Shahrzad Mojab, Sophie Robichaud, Patricia Roth, Sally Spilhaus and Michelle Séguin, is currently interviewing applicants. As a result of the hiring freeze, the new term will only begin on June 1.

In the interim, I have been coordinating the work of the Office. We are still receiving orders from around the world for "Inequity in the Classroom", the video and training manual on discrimination against women in the classroom. To date we have sold close to 1200 videos and manuals throughout Canada, the USA, Europe, Africa and Asia.

A new committee has formed to work on the History of Women at Concordia, a production we hope to launch for Concordia's 25th anniversary, provided funding is available.

We are also working on a proposal for a conference on the status of women at Concordia which will focus on the work and study environment of all Concordia women. At a brainstorming session held last December, several women indicated keen interest in such a conference.

In collaboration with the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, the Concordia Women's Center, the Women's Studies Student Association and several other partners, the Office is preparing a benefit show for International Women's Day on March 8, in support of a province-wide women's March Against Poverty (see announcement on page).

For more information on these projects or if you would like to get involved, you can reach us at 848-4841.

*Michelle Séguin  
Coordinator, Office on the Status of Women*

## **REVIEWING OUR "BEHAVIOUR" POLICIES - WHERE ARE WE HEADED?**

In November 1993, I was appointed chair of the Task Force to Review Policies Pertaining to Rights, Responsibilities and Behaviour. The Task Force's final report, submitted on October 1994, contains some recommendations which could dramatically change the way Concordia deals with unacceptable conduct, including all forms of discriminatory harassment and disruptive behaviour.

Some of these recommendations may be of particular interest to women. Amongst other things, the Task Force recommends that the Code of Conduct (Non-Academic) and the Sexual Harassment Policy be merged to form a single, multi-issue policy on rights and responsibilities, and that the resources of the two offices be combined. Briefly, our rationale for so doing is to enable us to be more effective in dealing with the whole range of discriminatory harassment - through better public education, the increased use of alternative forms of conflict resolution, and clearer, more consistent and fairer procedures.

The Secretary-General and the Vice-Rector, Services have now circulated the final report to all employee unions and student associations, soliciting comments. The deadline for comments passed on February 15, but it is not yet clear what will happen next.

Even with the best will in the world, it is difficult to engage a large number of people in discussion of any major policy document. For this reason, I invite anyone who would like to take a closer look at the final report to obtain a copy by calling Beth Crevier at 8659. I would also be happy to hear your comments or concerns about it. The more of us who take an interest in this document, the less likely it is that the process of implementing it in some form will drag on. Whether you like what the report says or not, the issues it raises are worth debating and keeping alive.

**Sally Spilhaus**  
**Sexual Harassment Officer**

### **BETWEEN THE LINES...**

Members of the Concordia community working on gender issues have often expressed the need for a university-wide newsletter on the status of women. The Office on the Status of Women is responding to this need with **BETWEEN THE LINES**. The goal is to stimulate dialogue and the exchange of information between all groups of women at Concordia, reflecting the diversity of our views and interests. Whether you represent one voice or many, this is your vehicle: use it to network, to debate, to tell each other about your projects and research, or to build alliances.

Women students, staff and faculty members are encouraged to contribute articles or news items, and to tell us what you think about what you need in **BETWEEN THE LINES**.

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## FACULTY STATUS OF WOMEN COMMITTEES: ONE STEP FORWARD, THREE STEPS BACK?

Of the four Faculties at this university, The Faculties of Fine Arts and Arts and Science were the only two faculties with fully viable Status of Women Committees up to the 1993/94 academic year. The Fine Arts Status of Women Committee has since become defunct. In the Faculties of Commerce and Administration and the Faculty of Engineering and Computer Science there is no formal Committee that looks after the interests of its women faculty, staff and students.

The Arts and Science Status of Women Committee which is a sub-committee of the Arts and Science Faculty Council, came into being in 1986. Its was composed of three full-time faculty members, one part-time faculty member, one representative of the Dean, two representatives of the non-academic support staff, one graduate student and two undergraduate students; it was given a five-point mandate and has made the following achievements.

### **Achievements to Date:**

In 1987, the Committee surveyed students graduating with GPA's of 3.0 or better to determine both the ratio of males to females proceeding to graduate studies and the reasons why some students choose not to continue.

In 1990-91 the Arts and Science Status of Women Committee designed two questions to be included on course evaluations and meant to assess professors's treatment of women in classroom and curriculum.

So far, seven departments agreed to use both questions, three agreed to use the first question, four agreed to formulate their own questions and four voted against use of either question.

In 1993-94 the Committee began putting out a newsletter (Real Issues) as a means of informing departments of ongoing issues and policies affecting women in the Faculty. They also organized a panel discussion with an invited speaker from the United States who spoke on, Sexism and Racism in the University.

In 1994-95 the Committee aims to continue to produce its newsletter, to bring in two speakers as part of its speakers series and to look at issues as they pertain to part-time female faculty in the Faculty of Arts and Science.

**Madeleine Yates,  
Arts and Science, Status of Women Committee**



In 1992-93 the focus turned to female staff within the faculty. A faculty-wide questionnaire to support staff revealed that over half of the female staff felt that they had experienced difficulties with Faculty members. They cited lack of respect, lack of communication, impoliteness and requests to perform tasks not in their job description as well as lack of planning as major factors in their day to day interactions within their departments. They complained of being subjected to unacceptable tensions and conflicts in the workplace. The Chairs were given copies of the tabulated results and the Human Resources Department were requested to develop policies to deal with faculty-staff and staff-staff conflict.

## EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND POWER

Equity--Academic freedom--scholarly integrity--political correctness--fairness--diversity--inclusive curriculum--accessibility--authoritarianism, etc., etc.

The recent discussions about educational equity call forth a whole variety of emotional responses, some of the most emotional coming from those who insist on the importance, indeed, the necessity of "objectivity" in scholarship and teaching as well as in grading and hiring policies. On the one side are those who insist that the realities of their lives and their cultural traditions have been absent from or distorted by the curriculum and scholarly traditions of academic institutions, and on the other side are those who insist on the universality, moral and cultural superiority, and ultimate truth of those scholarly traditions and canonized curricula.

What is interesting about the opposition to educational equity is that it is not really substantive but rather is primarily formal. That is to say, the objection is not to, let us say, the consideration that some writers who are not dead white men ought to be inserted into the literature curriculum, but rather the objection is to being told to reconsider the canon. One might consider the possibility that a calm, simple "yes, it's worth considering in the name of true universality, openness and fairness, that some interesting, creative and talented writers have been left out of the literature curriculum, and that perhaps I ought to reconsider my principles and priorities when I design my courses, and that perhaps I ought to start by reading something new in my field" as a rational response to the proposed policy. Unfortunately, the response is often, "No one can tell me what I ought to teach or how I ought to teach it." The frequency with which "academic freedom" is

used to argue against any and all policies for educational change indicates that the real issue is one of power, who holds it now and who might share it in the future. Those who hold the power afforded by virtue of tenure and the academic freedom that comes with it will not tolerate any threats to that power.

People working for social change need constantly to keep in mind Audre Lorde's words that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Campaigns for educational equity will not succeed on the strength of the clarity of the articulation of the policy, nor on the strength of the reasonableness of its argument. Commitment to educational equity is a form of commitment to social transformation, and that is a moral commitment which may or may not seen to be rational. However, it will certainly not be seen to be rational by those who hold the power to define the nature and characteristics of rationality itself. This does not mean that proponents of equity don't need to be able to argue our positions clearly, but rather that we have to understand that this is not an argument that can be "won." I am not, of course, agreeing with opponents of equity policies that these policies represent "special interests" as against the "common" or "universal interest" now prevailing. The very passion informing these opponents' arguments suggest which interests are "special." I am simply making the point that, from a position of taken-for-granted but unexamined power and privilege, certain things are simply beyond the horizon and therefore cannot be seen or comprehended. And yes, there is a clear danger of self-deception if we claim the moral high ground in working to change structures of oppression and domination. This is why we need to be constantly self-reflexive and self-critical in working for change, why we need to listen to the opponents of change even when they

refuse to hear us. Opponents of equity policies remind us repeatedly that the issue is really power.

Those who identify with the dominant cultural and intellectual tradition in the West will never be convinced by even the most reasoned arguments for educational equity, employment equity, inclusive curricula, and so on, because the dominant tradition defines the meaning of rationality, of excellence, of mankind, of civilization, and in those very definitions excludes the possibility

that dissenting voices will be heard. This is one of the powers that academic freedom and tenure maintain, the power of definition, of naming. Promotion of educational equity challenges that power and this is what its opponents see and fear so clearly.

**Dr. Martha Saunders**  
**Simone de Beauvoir Institute**

**Concordia University Benefit Cabaret  
for the Women's March Against Poverty  
International Women's Day  
Wednesday March 8, 1995 - 8 PM**

**Caesars - 1608 Lincoln  
(Metro Guy-Concordia)**

Featuring:

Penny Lang - Singer, Songwriter  
Tina Mintz - Comic  
Manushka - Chanteuse  
Jackie - Singer, Songwriter  
Heidi Foss - Comic  
Victoria Stanton - Spoken Word  
Amba - MC



Tickets on sale in advance only at:

**SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR INSTITUTE:  
2170 BISHOP ST. - 848-2372**

**CONCORDIA WOMEN'S CENTER:  
2020 MACKAY ST. - 848-7431**

**OFFICE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN:  
2150 BISHOP ST. - 848-4841**

**LIBRAIRIE L'ANDROGYNE -  
3636 BOUL. ST.-LAURENT - 842-4765**

Admission: \$7.00 (\$3.00 for students and low income)

**Sponsored by :** the Women's Studies Student Association, the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, the Office on the Status of Women, the Concordia's Women Centre, the Sexual Harassment Office, the Employment Equity Office, the International Student Office.  
In cooperation with Open City Productions 2002.

## PERSONAL SAFETY AUDIT: AN UPDATE

The university-wide personal safety audit currently being conducted at Concordia gives us an opportunity to affirm that concern for personal safety is an important value for the Concordia community. The audit will identify and consider the personal safety concerns of all Concordians, especially those of women. The idea is to give women who feel unsafe in the university environment a forum to voice their concerns and to take action.

The audit is about making public and semi-public space safer and more comfortable for women, by reducing the opportunities for crime, violence or harassment to occur. In addition to the audit of physical space, the process will look at how Concordia can deal effectively with behaviours that devalue women as full participants in the Concordia community. The basic premise of the audit is that if an environment is made safe for women, then it will be safe for everyone.

There are various data-collecting activities: auditing the physical environment of the buildings that house Concordia University, surveying the community regarding personal safety issues and concerns, determining the extent to which community members engage in risk behaviour while on campus, determining the degree to which interpersonal relations are inclusive and supportive of all individuals and groups and assessing the level of awareness of community members regarding personal safety policies and emergency procedures.

So far, audits of physical space, and of community awareness with regard to personal safety, are making progress. Eighty Concordia students, staff and faculty members worked together in audit teams to conduct 22 physical audits and develop reports recommending short- and long-term remedial action. The audit teams investigated many aspects of personal safety in their buildings, including sightlines, lighting, signage, entrapment and assault sites, movement predictors,

building maintenance and design and factors that make the environment feel more human. The second round of physical audits is about to begin. Approximately one third of Concordia's 86 buildings have undergone physical audits. We are now developing strategies to act on the resulting short-term recommendations. As well, the response to the survey was good and the responses are now being coded and organized.

The next stage of the audit process is to take a close look at the way community members interact in the work and study environment. By analyzing the experience of individual community members, we hope to identify attitudes and behaviours which undermine an individual's ability to function fully as a student or employee, and to make recommendations as to how they may be changed.

A "dialogue group" will be formed to do some brainstorming, with a view of developing a framework for the collection and analysis of relevant data. We will then seek information from members of the Concordia community on questions such as:

- ◊ What are relations between members of the community currently like at Concordia?
- ◊ What should they be like in order to ensure the full participation of all members in their work and study activities?
- ◊ How can we describe the gap between the "ideal" and the "real" with regard to community relations?
- ◊ What training, education and leadership models can we recommend in order to bring about a better "climate" at Concordia?

This is your Personal Safety Audit. Make it work for you - get involved! For information, call **Kathy MacDonald, Personal Safety Audit Coordinator, at 597-1597.**



## To Veil Or Not To Veil: That Is Not The Question



After three months of research and deliberation, the Quebec Human Rights Commission report of February 16 concluded that banning the hijab (the Islamic head scarf) or imposing it on non-Muslims in public schools is discriminatory. This conclusion was applauded in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Quebec. Although the decision is not binding, it promotes a more tolerant approach to religious and cultural diversity. The controversy also provided an opportunity for a fresh dialogue on cultural pluralism in Quebec society.

The conflict began in September 1994 when the principal of a high school in Montreal refused to permit a veiled student to attend the school, arguing that it violated the dress code. Refusing to remove the veil, the student was forced to change her school. The event soon attracted media and public attention. However, much of the debate addressed the question "to veil or not to veil". The main issue, individual rights and freedom of religion, was overshadowed by discussions of the role of the hijab in Islamic society.

Some of the underlying assumptions about the veil are largely irrelevant to the question of veiling in Quebec society. First, it is argued that the veil is a symbol of oppression and gender segregation. While this is true in some Islamic societies, it is a much more complex issue. The veil can be seen as a symbol of patriarchal domination and repression of women especially when it is imposed by the state in countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. In other countries, such as Turkey and Egypt, some women use the hijab in defiance of an equally repressive, secular state authority.

In the secular national liberation struggle of Algeria against French colonialism, women used the veil as a cover for their political activism. Thus, the veil assumes diverse meanings or functions in different contexts.

The veil is the effect rather than the cause of women's oppression. Even without the hijab, Muslim women will remain oppressed as long as the patriarchal system is in power. In Republican Turkey, Western-style secularism became official state policy since the 1920s. The power of the religious establishment was effectively curbed and the hijab was eliminated. Still, Turkish women remained as oppressed as their sisters in neighbouring countries. Much like Turkey, the Iranian dictator, Reza Shah (1925-41), used state coercion in order to unveil women; however, oppression remained the order of the day. Today, in many Islamic countries, the remnants of feudal relations, neocolonial domination, capitalism and the absolute power of the state combine to discriminate against women.

Many in the West will be surprised to know that women in rural and tribal societies in Islamic countries generally do not veil. In the Kurdish countryside, for example, women have never experienced the hijab. In urban areas throughout the Islamic world, there is indeed a long history of struggle by secular, feminist and nationalist women and men against veiling. In Iran, for example, long before the forced unveiling by the government in 1936, some women in the major cities had removed their hijab. One of the best known poems of the famous Iranian poet, Eshqi, castigated the veil as "The Black Shroud."

Another underlying assumption is the equation of the hijab with Islamic "fundamentalism." It is true that "fundamentalists" uphold the hijab as a religious symbol, but not all veiled women are fundamentalists. Islam, much like Christianity and Judaism, is not a unified, monolithic body of religious beliefs and practices. Some practicing Muslims do not veil at all while others with liberal political tendencies prefer to veil. Thus, the issue is not the veil. This is especially the case in the context of Quebec society. It is our experience that "fundamentalism," whether Islamic or Christian, is against the rights of women. The growing violent anti-choice actions are a good reminder, not to mention the fundamentalists' anti-Semitism, homophobia, racism, and attack on secular education. The breeding ground for fundamentalist politics is not the "fundamentals" of religion, which have always been there. It seems that economic crisis, poverty, unemployment, alienation and the unequal distribution of power are the main causes of the rise of such destructive politics.

In Quebec schools, the main issue is tolerance and respect for diversity. Students, teachers and staff should enjoy the freedom to veil or not to veil. The Human Rights Commission report noted that those who wear the veil in Quebec express their religious convictions; wearing the hijab is a matter of personal conscience which should be accommodated reasonably in a democratic society. Instead of banning the hijab, the report suggested that schools teach tolerance so that no hijab-wearing person is subjected to discrimination. We need to contextualize the issue within the realities of Quebec, which is evolving as a more diverse society. Diversity is desirable in a democratic system, but it is a challenge that should be met.

**Dr. Shahrzad Mojab**  
**Department of Applied Social Science**

## BORDER CROSSINGS

### Publications

At Concordia, we have:

- the Inclusive Teaching Newsletter published by women in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration (call 848-2700)
- Our Very Own Bibliography on Feminist Research in Communications by Kimberly A. Sawchuk and Julianne Piddock (call 848-2555)
- a bibliography of feminist journals available at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute (call 848-2373)
- brochures ( call 848-4841 ): Concordia Resource Guide for Women  
Making Smart Choices About Personal Safety

### Events

Upcoming Concordia workshop "**Towards Integrated Teaching Practices**", on April 6 and 7, 1995 . Possible workshop topics: evaluation, creating safety in the classroom, storytelling and tricks, student concerns. To register, call Kaarina Kailo, 848-2495.

**The Women's March Against Poverty--"Bread and Roses"** : from May 26 to June 4, 1995, women will march towards Quebec City for a gathering in front of the National Assembly for information call Michelle Séguin 848-4841.

**Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women** in Beijing, China, September 1995 . For more information call 613-995-7835.

